

House Agriculture Committee

Testimony Senate Bill 996

December 2, 2012



National Wolfwatcher Coalition

<http://wolfwatcher.org>

National Headquarters

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Dear Committee Members,

The National Wolfwatcher Coalition is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting positive attitudes about wolves through education. We recognize the importance of the wolf to the natural balance of nature and we appreciate the ecological importance of this keystone predator.

The National Wolfwatcher Coalition believes Senate Bill 996 is inconsistent with the approved 2008 Wolf Management Plan and we oppose its passage.

The Michigan Wolf Management Plan is regarded as one of the best in the nation as it strikes a balance between protecting wolves and resolving conflicts. The plan was developed through a process that included involvement of affected stakeholder groups and the general public along with the evaluation of peer-reviewed, scientific data.

Since delisting, ten months ago, the MI DNR has implemented the approved plan which allows for lethal control of wolves responsible for the injury or death of livestock. Lethal control can be carried out by Wildlife Services or through landowner permits. Livestock producers can also kill wolves, without a permit, if the wolf is in the act of attacking their livestock.

Senate Bill 996 is unnecessary as producers are compensated for verified livestock killed or injured by wolves regardless of the extent to which efforts have been made to reduce depredation risks. The amount of compensation paid to the producer who suffers a loss is determined by the Michigan Department of Agriculture based on time of loss.

We do not support compensation for missing livestock. Further, we strongly oppose the weak documentation required as outlined in Senate Bill 996 which states on Page 2, Line 15, "If the

claim seeks indemnification for missing animals, a notarized statement from the owner ... is sufficient documentation that 1 or more animals are missing and eligible for indemnification."

Livestock can die for many unexplained reasons other than predatory depredation and they can and do go missing for reasons other than wolves. Some missing livestock even return home, unharmed. Yet, Senate Bill 996 allows for compensation for missing animals with a mere statement. Senate Bill 996 implies that the owner makes his own determination verifies his own loss and isn't even required to submit photos to support the claim.

Section 6.10.1 of the MI Wolf Management Plan states "...at least 27% of the wolf-depredation complaints submitted by Michigan residents in 2004 were prompted by depredation that were actually caused by dogs or coyotes. Another 23% of the alleged wolf-depredation events reported in 2004 could not be attributed to a specific cause because the available physical evidence was insufficient." In these cases the producers had a dead/missing animal and still they erroneously blamed the wolf 27% of the time.

Predators often consume animals that die of natural causes without actually being responsible for their death. Larger raptors (great-horned owl, red-tail hawk, bald eagle) have also been known to kill livestock and pets as well. Eagles have been documented killing lambs and there has even been an occurrence of raven causing problems with new born lamb calves. Therefore, it is critical that a trained specialist investigate all claims involving the death, injury or missing livestock allegedly caused by wolves. It is equally critical that as part of the verification process the owner must allow access to the property if they wish to claim indemnification.

Under SB 996, a producer can receive compensation for missing livestock if there is a history of losses due to the death or injury of livestock from wolves, however, this legislation fails to invoke a reasonable timeframe. A past history of losses by wolves is not conclusive evidence that wolves are responsible for missing livestock. You must also keep in mind that, with implementation of lethal control, the wolf or wolves responsible for depredation may have been killed.

Two other components of Senate Bill 996 are troublesome:

- With budget cuts, staff shortages and multi-agency involvement, it is unreasonable to expect that an indemnification payment be made within 45 days. The timeframe must include adequate time to conduct an investigation, perhaps a site visit, consultation with the owner regarding the value of the animal, creation of a 1099 form and the issuance of the check. There are times when a DNA analysis may be required as well.
- Given the current privacy laws, the department is not in a position to determine if the producer received or is expected to receive compensation from any other source prior to making a depredation payment.

Any legislation must be based on facts not emotion or fears and must not be a drain on taxpayers. This bill is not necessary. It will cost the state money we do not have and creates an atmosphere for fraud and deception at taxpayer expense.

We ask that Senate Bill 996 not advance. Instead, please allow MI DNR to fully implement the Wolf Management Plan without legislative intrusion.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

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